

Power Sources: Be Prepared When the Lights Go Out

Power outages can be about much more than not having lights or air conditioning. Blackouts can also disrupt medical services, close pharmacies and create life-threatening situations. Major outages caused by large-scale disasters tend to last much longer than the average blackout.

Be prepared to go without electricity for days rather than hours. Here's what you'll want to have in order to outlast a prolonged blackout:

- Emergency lighting, such as a flashlight or battery-powered lantern. Do not use candles when the lights go out. Candles pose a serious, fire hazard.
- Extra batteries in standard sizes, such as AA and AAA
- Car charger(s) and adapters for electric-dependent equipment and devices
- A battery-powered or hand-crank NOAA weather radio with USB port(s)
- A surge protector power strip(s)
- A generator (**important details below**)

QUICK TIPS

- Create an [Emergency Power Planning Checklist](#) for your medical devices
- Fully charge your cellphone, medical devices, and back-up power sources if you know a disaster, like a hurricane, is coming.
- Contact your local fire department and utility companies if you rely on an electricity-powered, home use medical device. Some electricity providers keep a "priority reconnection service" list of power-dependent customers.

Safe Generator Use

Use extreme caution with portable [generators](#). The carbon monoxide (CO) in generator exhaust is an invisible, odorless killer, plain and simple. You can't see it, smell it, or taste it; yet, there it is any time you burn a fossil fuel in, for example, a car, generator, furnace, grill, or space heater.

Unintentional, non-fire related CO poisoning takes the lives of at least 430 people and sends another 50,000 people to the emergency department in the U.S. every year. Occurrences of accidental poisonings increase when—in the aftermath of a disaster or emergency—people try to generate power, to heat their homes, or to cook.

Here are three ways you can prepare for and prevent CO poisoning after a disaster.

- Learn how to use a back-up generator safely. Place generators outside, in a dry area, and at least 20 feet from any door, window, or vent. Never run a generator inside your home or garage, even if doors and windows are open.
- Install battery-powered or battery backed-up CO detectors in your home. The U.S. Fire Administration recommends that you test your devices at least once a month. Change the batteries in your CO detectors every six months. If your detector alarms, go outside for fresh air and call 911.
- Know the symptoms of CO poisoning. The most common symptoms of CO poisoning are headache, dizziness, weakness, upset stomach, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion.

For more Prepare Your Health information, tips, and checklists, visit cdc.gov/prepyourhealth.